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ABSTRACT

Webster University (Missouri), an independent, liberal arts university, developed a teacher preparation program on both the graduate and undergraduate levels in inclusive education aimed at preservice and practicing teachers and covering early childhood to secondary education. Several models emerged in the teacher preparation program. The unified curriculum of the graduate Early Childhood degree program merged the discussion of issues in educating all young children, including children with disabilities. The unified core of the undergraduate education program fostered an attitude of shared responsibility for all children. An elective course, "Inclusion Strategies in the Regular Classroom," enriched the curriculum and prepared students pursuing special education for the typical classroom. The graduate emphasis in inclusive education represented an embedded approach by including opportunities for graduate students to learn about inclusive education practices while they were concentrating in specialized areas of study. At both undergraduate and graduate levels there has been a trend toward dual certification in special education or early childhood special education and elementary or early childhood certification. Efforts to prepare teachers for inclusion have led to a reconceptualization of the teacher education program as a whole. Resistance to change, state certification standards, limited resources and time, competing interests, and lack of familiarity with inclusion among faculty were all barriers encountered and not yet completely overcome in the program's development. (Contains 13 references.) (JB)

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# Reforming teacher education: The challenge of inclusive education

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**Abstract**

Current efforts towards school restructuring, particularly in reference to inclusive practices in schools, present significant challenges to teacher education. The success of these efforts relies extensively on the responsiveness and willingness of teacher education programs to prepare teachers for inclusive education. This paper describes the development of a teacher preparation program in inclusive education at an independent liberal arts university located in the midwest. The program is directed towards both preservice and practicing teachers and covers the range of educational services from early childhood to secondary education. Although the program is in the preliminary stages of implementation, several challenges have been identified, such as resistance to change, state certification barriers, competing interests, limited resources and time, and lack of familiarity among faculty with inclusive education.

**Reforming teacher education: The challenge of inclusive education**

As inclusive schools emerge around the country, the need for teachers prepared to teach children with diverse abilities and needs is a critical issue. At a time when education is grappling with issues of reform and restructuring, inclusive education presents an additional challenge for teacher education. Not only are institutions of higher education faced with increasing regulation of teacher education programs and greater demands on the knowledge base of teachers, we are also chargedwith responsibility of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse student body within inclusive schools.

In order to meet this challenge, some eminent teacher educators have proposed merging regular and special education into a unified program of study (Lilly, 1989; Pugach, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1989). According to these proponents, such programs would increase the curricular integrity of teacher education, increase flexibility and utilization of faculty resources, and improve education in general. These teacher educators favor a singular teacher education program designed for all teachers.

Although unified teacher education programs have been developed in several areas of the country (e.g.. Kemple, Hartle, Correa, & Fox, 1994; Meyer & Biklen, 1992; Pugach, 1994), examples are slow in developing. Survey results reported by Heller (1994) suggest that there is considerable resistance to the merger proposal among chairs and deans of schools, colleges or departments of Education, and especially from Special Education departments. Other models of teacher preparation, such as infusion of the general education preservice curriculum with principles and strategies relevant to students with special needs (e.g.. Aksamit, 1990), additional coursework focusing on students with disabilities, and dual certification (elementary and special education) of special educators are emerging.

This paper describes preliminary efforts to develop an teacher education program that prepares its graduates to teach in inclusive schools. Webster University, a independent liberal arts university from the midwest, offers undergraduate and graduate programs in Education to

approximately 150 undergraduate majors and 750 graduate students. Located in St. Louis, Missouri, the teacher education program is driven to a large extent by the Missouri state certification requirements as well as the nature of school organization at both the state and local levels. Historically, Missouri has maintained a categorical approach to special education (although recently, a noncategorical certificate was promulgated). Not only is special education separated from general education in so far as certification standards are concerned, a strong tradition exists of separation of services to students with special education needs. For example, Missouri operates a state-wide school system for students with significant and severe disabilities. In the St. Louis region, a Special School District acts as an umbrella district providing special education services to 23 school districts in St. Louis County. Although most students with mild educational disabilities are educated in the local school district buildings in classrooms staffed by the Special School District, students with significant disabilities most often receive services at Special School District buildings.

In the late 1980's, several families whose children have significant disabilities approached their local school districts to enroll their children in neighborhood schools. Many of these children had "graduated" from a unique integrated early childhood program, The Belle Center. The numbers of families requesting inclusion of their children into local schools has grown to over one hundred this year, raising concerns about staff development and teacher training.

Our efforts to prepare teachers for inclusive education have moved in several directions. As a faculty of a single Education department in an independent liberal arts institution, we have the luxury of a organizational structure which is responsive to the perceived needs of our constituency of prospective and practicing teachers. Over the past several years the faculty collectively developed a new mission statement, and has engaged in considerable discussion of identifying student outcomes, one of which is "The teacher/graduate will embrace diversity in a multicultural setting, teaching to individual needs". These discussions have generated several program initiatives in inclusive education.

Graduate early childhood program. In the fall of 1989, faculty from early childhood

education and special education began discussions about a unified curriculum. They shared a common desire to promote an ecological systems perspective on children, families and community and a conviction that children with special needs should be fully included in regular education. What emerged from these discussions was a plan for a new area of concentration that merged what we know about best practices in early childhood special education and developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education. We called it simply, Early Childhood Education. It operates from the beliefs that all children have the ability to be successful, that they have the right to fully included in their community and that schools must respond to the diverse needs of children.

Our catalog description of this program reads:

> "This area of concentration focuses on integration of students and subject matter through collaborative efforts among educators, families, and the community in meeting young children's needs. While the primary focus is on children, this program of study takes an ecological systems perspective on children, families, and community.
>
> Students learn to identify developmental needs and design appropriate educational plans for children who are 'typically developing' as well as those who have special needs. Strategies for meeting the needs of all children in the least restrictive environment are emphasized. Throughout this area of concentration students explore methods of consultation and collaboration among teachers, therapists, parents, and others involved in providing services to young children."

In order to promote integration of curriculum, integration of students, and collaboration among educators, families and community, we created a set of core courses that would provide the focus on principles and practices supporting these goals. Six of the nine hours of this core engage students in advanced study of child development (both typical and atypical) and implications for early childhood education. Our premise is that all curriculum should be rooted in child study.

Teachers must not only have a strong general understanding of theory and research about child development and learning, but also develop the ability and disposition to continuously observe and analyze the particular development, learning styles, history, relationships, and culture of the children they teach. It is assumed that each child comes to us with a unique history and is part of a complex community that affects her ability to grow and learn.

Another course in the core challenges teachers to examine the ecological systems perspective on children, families and community. The interdependent roles of teachers, parents, and community in supporting the development of children and youth are emphasized. A family centered approach which seeks to strengthen and support families is promoted. This course is required for both the Early Childhood and the Special Education areas of concentration in the Masters of Arts in Teaching (M. A. T.) program. As a result, a mixture of teachers with regular and special education backgrounds attend the same course. This has provided a very important dynamic for promoting communication among teachers who are being encouraged to move to the collaboration and consultation model needed to support inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms.

Throughout the program we advocate a curriculum that is responsive to individuals and, therefore, must be differentiated. On the other hand, we are promoting classrooms that also focus on the development of the group, the community of learners who share a sense of belonging and reciprocity.

We are working with teachers to become change agents in systems where such curriculum is not in place. We challenge each teacher to consider themselves part of an interconnected system of support for students rather than a single force on the individual's development. This requires them to place themselves in relationship with parents, other teachers, specialists, community services and resources, the broader community and society. Teachers cannot function as experts who operate in isolation from this larger set of forces on children's lives. It means developing relationships that require each person to understand how she depends on others in the system and how they depend on her. This means developing skills in

collaboration, communication, advocacy, and community building.

Since the development of our Early Childhood Education master's degree program, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) have developed a position statement on personnel standards for early education and early intervention (ATE, DEC, & NAEYC, 1993). This document was the result of a commitment to establishing a shared vision among these professional organizations for the credentialing of individuals working with young children and their families. The recommendations support the kind of increased uniformity and unification in preparation of early childhood educators and early childhood special educators that Webster University promotes in our master's degree program.

Preservice inclusive education program. A second initiative focuses on the preservice teacher education program. Currently, Webster University offers a B. A. in Education, with the possibility of pursuing an emphasis (or specialization) in early childhood, elementary, secondary, or special education . All education majors are required to take a common core of coursework in Foundations of Education, Early Field Experience, and The Exceptional Individual. Additionally all students are required to take at least one course in child, adolescent, or educational psychology, at least one course in the history, sociology, or philosophy of education, classroom organization and curriculum (elementary or secondary), and finally a choice of apprentice teaching or senior overview. All students are required to have field experience prior to apprentice teaching. Emphasis areas are available through variety of elective courses.

In 1992, we introduced an undergraduate course Inclusion Strategies in the Regular Classroom into our curriculum. This is an elective course designed for all education students to explore educational strategies that promote social and academic integration of children with special needs within the regular classroom, with particular emphasis on students with significant and severe disabilities. Strategies focus on planning, teaching, facilitating friendships, using natural supports, problem solving, team collaboration, adapting curriculum and instruction,

functional curriculum, managing challenging behavior, disability awareness curriculum, from a family-centered focus. In order that students have opportunities to build connections between theory and practice, six hours per week of field experience are arranged in a regular classroom in which a student with a significant disability is included. The organizing theme of the course conceptualizes the classroom as a community of learners, in which the students and their families along with teachers, and other members of school have shared responsibility toward enhancing the quality of life of each individual member.

Graduate inclusive education emphasis. In the summer of 1992, Webster University offered a series of graduate inservice courses on the topic of Full Inclusion. The favorable response to the workshops encouraged us to develop an emphasis (or minor) in Inclusive Education in the Masters of Arts in Teaching (M. A. T.) degree program . The emphasis is designed to provide regular and special educators at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels with the knowledge base, practical applications and strategies necessary for implementing a successful inclusive education program appropriate to the diverse needs of students in today's regular classroom. Our goal is to enable practicing teachers to investigate issues and examine strategies that relate to the education of all students, regardless of ability, in their local school

A unique feature of this emphasis is its availability to students specializing in a variety of areas in the M. A. T. program (for example, Communications, Early Childhood Education, Multidisciplinary Studies, Social Sciences, or Special Education). Rather than encapsulate the study of inclusive practices to the area of Special Education, the emphasis area is embedded across most of the graduate curriculum.

The core of the emphasis area consists of two courses, Planning for the Inclusive Classroom and Curricular and Instructional Adaptations. To satisfy the emphasis area requirements, students select two additional courses from a variety of topics related to inclusive education (see Table 1).

In designing the emphasis, we met with regular and special education teachers, parents,

principals and administrators to identify the core principles, values, and practices upon which the emphasis area would be built. These principles permeate the literature in inclusive education, growing out of the research on restructuring schools. They recognize the goal of inclusive education as the operationalization of democratic principles in society, with a commitment to equal access and participation in school life, acceptance of diversity, individualized education appropriate to the needs of all children, collaboration, and site-based management.

Summary. Several models are emerging in our teacher preparation program in inclusive education: *unified curriculum, enrichment, embedded, dual certification,* an *infusion.* The variety of models allows us to tailor the programs of our students according to their specific needs and diverse circumstances.

The *unified curriculum* of the graduate Early Childhood degree program merges the discussion of issues relating to the education of all young children, including those with disabilities.

The unified core of the undergraduate education program fosters an attitude of shared responsibility for all children. *Enriching* the curriculum with Inclusion Strategies in the Regular Classroom prepares students pursuing special education for the typical classroom. Similarly, other education students are introduced into inclusive field placements, and learn strategies that foster integration of students with special needs into regular classroom environments.

The graduate emphasis in Inclusive Education represents an *embedded* approach to teacher preparation. Recognizing the value for specialization in content areas for practicing teachers, we have embedded opportunities for graduate students to learn about inclusive education practices at the same time they are concentrating in a specialized area of study.

At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the trend among many students emphasizing special education is to pursue *dual certification* in regular (or early childhood) and special education. The majority of the undergraduate students pursuing certification in special education or early childhood special education are also eligible for elementary and/or early childhood certification.

In our efforts to prepare teachers for inclusion, we have begun to reconceptualize the teacher education program as a whole. Our goal is to *infuse* the content of the professional education program to include instructional and curricular techniques appropriate for the developmental, cognitive, social, cultural and physical needs of diverse learners. Our plan for the next several years is to work with department colleagues to analyze the content of our methods courses in terms of best practices, identify opportunities for introducing and supporting inclusive educational practices, and collaborate with public school teachers and faculty working in inclusive schools to develop instructional modules that illustrate adaptations specific to content areas or subject matter. In the same way that special educators are transforming their roles in public schools from direct service providers to consultants and specialists, our proposal involves a similar transformation of roles in higher education for professors of special education.

**The Challenge of Inclusive Education for Teacher Education Programs**

Restructuring teacher education presents a set of challenges not unlike those experienced by teachers, administrators, and families working towards achieving the promise of inclusive schools. Even in our department, which began and has continued as singular entity, and has committed to a shared goal of preparing teachers to be responsive to diverse learners, there are various sources of resistance to implementing the program, from both faculty and students.

Resistance to change Movement towards inclusive education involves a change process for faculty in higher education. Our experience could easily be compared to the change process that teachers and schools at any level experience when moving toward innovation or reform. Like others, we have found that the most significant barriers to change include lack of necessary resources such as time, money, materials and education. Limited resources leads to competition, and in this case, inclusive education must compete with other new developments in the field of education. Change requires an understanding of the innovation; time to learn, struggle, and experiment as we construct our own understanding of the theory and practices involved; financial resources to provide needed consultation and education; opportunities and support for the sharing of ideas and social interaction among faculty so that we can coordinate points of view.

The greatest problem related to our work has been in providing a curriculum that is responsive to the resistance to change that sometimes come from our students or the systems in which they work. Even though students choose our program with full awareness of our orientation toward inclusion, they are caught in the uncertainty arising from the paradigm shift taking place in education today. Their deep-seated biases and concerns surface as they are challenged to move toward the collaborative model of working with other teachers, family, specialists and other community resources. As they discover the incompatibility of many school policies and practices with the philosophy of inclusion and developmentally appropriate practice, their anxiety grows and feelings of helplessness develop or skepticism takes over.

Another challenge for many of our students, especially those with prior background in special education, is the movement from fixed curriculum to emergent curriculum. This shift involves movement from establishing, in advance, specific objectives and procedures for learning experiences to laying out general educational objectives. It means hypothesizing directions for projects or activities, studying student's ideas, interests and abilities and then planning ways to provoke and sustain interest and involvement among a diverse group of youngsters. It means taking on the challenge of planning ways to support children's involvement with each other. It means projecting ways to support, entice, or invite young people to answer their own questions and explore or test their own lines of thought and those of others. It involves formulating objectives that are flexible, adaptable and responsive to the emerging needs and interests of students and the dynamics of learning contexts and opportunities. It requires teachers to be constantly in the role of assessor and researcher in order to know how to support the development of the individual as well as the group. Finally, it requires teachers to think creatively about ways to support children and youth in realizing the goals of their IEPs within a classroom that promotes learning in meaningful contexts. All of this leads to dilemmas for teachers about equal allocation of time and resources versus differential allocation of time and resources for individual students.

State certification standards. Another challenge to teacher education reform stems from

the dilemma created by increasingly demanding state-imposed standards for certification. As in Missouri, many states endorse the separation of regular and special education with different certification requirements, as well as support a categorical approach to special education certification. Given increasing economic pressures, few students can afford, either in time or money, to enroll in courses that are not required for certification. As new competencies are added to the list of certification requirements, pragmatic necessity alters students' preferences and decisions. If fewer students choose to study inclusive education practices, the viability of such courses will become questionable from an administrative or fiscal perspective. This possibility has strengthened our resolve to focus our future efforts on the 'infusion" model, collapsing the content of our inclusion strategies course into the preservice methods courses.

Lack of familiarity with inclusion among faculty. Another challenge that we have encountered arises out of faculty bias, albeit very subtle, that occurs during the advising process. It is our hypothesis that the faculty in our department, although committed to the democratic values of inclusive education, are not knowledgeable with specific content of the courses. This leads to unintentional, unspoken preferences for familiar content area courses, which is likely to be sensed by students in the program. Although the "Inclusive Education" courses have been subscribed to by students from all areas of the M. A. T., the numbers are lower than we expected. As in any change process, we are reminded of the necessity, and power, of an informed and educated constituency, specifically the faculty..

Conclusion. As we move toward complete infusion of the curriculum in regard to the philosophy and practices of inclusion, we anticipate even stronger personal resistance and structural barriers. We are studying the literature on critical attributes of effective teacher development programs and ways to support change in schools (Costa, Garmston, & Lambert, 1988; Eisner, 1992; Fullan, 1990; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hord, Rutherford, Hulling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). We hope to deal with the recognized barriers to change by countering them with a structure of support for faculty which provides a variety of options for professional development in regard to inclusion. These may include opportunities to receive individual or

group consultation from special education faculty. This could take the form of mentoring, team teaching, group instruction or coaching. Peer support groups could be established for faculty to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and/or engage in collective reflection on experience or educational resources.

We will try to build connections between inclusive education and the competing interests of faculty so that the innovation will not be experienced as one more thing to do, but rather a new and interesting twist on something faculty members are already doing. Since we know that each them already shares a commitment to meeting diverse needs of students, we will ask their help in supplying us with examples or working with us on particular cases where teachers are supporting the inclusion of students with special needs. Through this kind of process, we can become co-learners in regard to inclusive education.

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**Table 1**

WEBSTER UNIVERSITY
M.A.T. EMPHASIS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
(Effective June, 1994)

The emphasis in inclusive education is designed to provide classroom teachers, regular and special educators at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels, with the knowledge base, practical applications and strategies necessary for implementing a successful inclusive education program, appropriate to the diverse needs of students in today's regular classroom. This emphasis will enable practicing teachers to investigate issues and examine strategies that relate to the education of all students, regardless of ability, in their local school. In addition to the required courses for the respective area of concentration , students must complete at least 12 hours of appropriate coursework related to inclusive education.

The following two courses are required for the area of emphasis in Inclusive Education:

Planning for the Inclusive Classroom: This course introduces the key factors underlying successful planning for the inclusive classroom. Following an examination of the philosophical and legal bases underlying inclusion, students explore issues related to change and educational reform, increasing disability awareness, team building, action planning, using natural supports and problem solving strategies.

Curricular and Instructional Adaptations: This course offers a framework for adapting the regular classroom environment to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities. Curriculum adaptations, instructional modifications, and environmental accommodations are explored as strategies to support students with special needs in the regular classroom.

Students select at least 6 hours from the following:

Topics in Special Education: Collaboration and Cooperative Teaching: This course will focus on professional collaboration, including teachers working together (collaborative consultation, cooperative teaching, or Class Within a Class, teacher teams, and peer coaching) as well as students working together (classwide peer tutoring and cooperative learning). Participants will learn to use various collaborative structures, effective cooperative teaching techniques, problem solving methods, and content enhancement devices.

Topics in Special Education: Advocating for Persons with Disabilities: Students examine the role of teachers, parents, and professionals in advocating for appropriate services for persons with disabilities. Special emphasis is on the parent-professional relationship, civil rights, due process, participation in educational planning, and advocating for fuller inclusion.

Topics in Special Education: Health Issues & the Special Needs Child: In this course, students explore various current health issues as they relate to the teacher in a regular or special classroom. Focus is placed on the health needs and psycho-social needs of chronically ill children and the teacher's role in meeting those needs.

Career Preparation for Students with Special Needs: This course presents teachers with career development concepts and techniques for preparing students with special needs to make the successful transition from school to working and living in the community. Career education models and programming strategies are presented for elementary through secondary educational levels, with emphasis on adolescents.

Behavioral Management for Children with Special Needs: This is an advanced course in behavior management techniques designed for special education teachers and other human service professionals.

Integrating Resources: Community, School, and Family: This course is designed to help students identify changing family and community structures, patterns, and relationships. Students determine how these influence children and their educational needs. They study methods of assessing family needs and interests, identifying and utilizing community resources, and responding to family needs through education and partnerships. They review models of consultation and case management in regard to children and families with special needs. They explore and simulate techniques for interacting with parents, and they examine collaborative strategies for interdisciplinary team efforts.

This area of emphasis is available to students pursuing a M.A.T. in Communications, Early Childhood Education, Multidisciplinary Studies, Social Sciences, and Special Education.